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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/SPG, NEA/ELA

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SUBJECT: SUDAN: NEW ARAB LEAGUE ENVOY DESCRIBES HIS MANDATE
FOR DARFUR

Classified by Minister Counselor for Economic and Political
Affairs William R. Stewart for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Recently-appointed Arab League Special Envoy for Sudan Salah Halima told us February 26 that his primary mission is to focus on humanitarian assistance and development in Darfur. Halima advised the USG to "respect Sudanese sovereignty," in order to improve the USG-GOS relationship and improve the political and security environment in Darfur. We believe that Halima and the Arab League could be effective intermediaries with Khartoum to speed humanitarian and development assistance in cases that the GOS supports. End summary.

Humanitarian and Development Assistance

¶2. (SBU) We met with recently-appointed Arab League Special Envoy for Sudan, Salah Halima, on February 26. In his new capacity, Halima plans to take up residence in Khartoum on or about March 5. His primary mission, he said, will be to focus on humanitarian assistance and development in Darfur, building upon the Arab League donors conference for Sudan held in Khartoum in fall 2007. The Arab League intends to center its efforts on the areas of Darfur that are already "safe and secure," which Halima described as "most of Darfur." Halima argued that an improved humanitarian situation and development in these areas would serve as an example of the benefits of peace to the areas where fighting continues. The Arab League will work either unilaterally or in conjunction with the UN and AU, he said, whatever best facilitates improving the situation on the ground quickly.

U.S. Should Respect Khartoum's Sovereignty

¶3. (SBU) On the Darfur political process, Halima echoed the Arab League and Egyptian position that the USG and international community should take a more conciliatory approach with the Khartoum government by putting "equal pressure" on the rebel parties to work towards peace. In particular, the U.S. needs to develop a better relationship with the GOS, he said - "then, many things can be achieved." Echoing points made by Special Envoy to Sudan Richard Williamson to Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit (septel), we noted that the USG is raising the pressure on the rebels as well as the GOS by pressing Chad to cease support for Darfur rebels and supporting a European force on the Chad/Sudan border.

¶4. (SBU) When we noted that the GOS bears the blame for obstructing Swedish, Norwegian, Thai, and Nepalese

peace-keepers for UNAMID, Halima opined that the GOS is justified in rejecting at least the Nordic element. The over-riding perception in the Arab world is that Nordic countries are "against Islam," he said, a perception that comes from periodic publications in Danish newspapers of cartoons of the prophet Mohamed. Halima several times emphasized the need to "respect Sudanese sovereignty," and that no decisions on peace-keeping or anything else in Sudan should be "forced down their throats." On the GOS rejection of Thai and Nepalese troops he said he needed to study the matter more carefully.

Comment

15. (C) Halima's comments reflect that the Arab League shows no appetite for being critical of the Khartoum government. However, we believe that Halima and the Arab League could be effective intermediaries with Khartoum to break down bureaucratic obstacles to humanitarian and development assistance in cases that the GOS supports.

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